

( ) NOT FOR PUBLICATION

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SOUTH CAROLINA INVENTORY FORM FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND  
INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES IN A MULTIPLE PROPERTY SUBMISSION

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NAME OF MULTIPLE PROPERTY SUBMISSION: Historic Resources of Greenville

PREFERRED NAME OF PROPERTY: Imperial Hotel

HISTORIC NAME OF PROPERTY: Same

COMMON NAME OF PROPERTY: Hotel Greenville

LOCATION: 201 West Washington Street, Greenville, SC

CLASSIFICATION: building

OWNER: Greenville Associates  
6405 Barfield Road NE  
Atlanta, Georgia

DESCRIPTION

The Imperial Hotel was constructed in 1912 as a seven-story skyscraper with buff colored brick veneer over a steel frame. The "U" shaped footprint of the building is largely unadorned with the first floor facade featuring elliptical fanlighted windows followed by six floors with six-over-one windows. The building has a flat roof topped by a metal boxed cornice supported by brackets. There are Art Deco influenced decorative moldings applied below each set of brackets. About forty percent of the windows are original six-over-one; the balance are replacement two-over-two units. There is a canopy over the main entrance of the Washington Street facade.

The first floor lobby area has Terrazo Tile floors, marble stairs and baseboards, brass rail detailing and pine paneling. Numerous large wood panelled columns support the first floor interior ceiling which is panelled with multiple plaster moldings. The upper floor rooms are unadorned with simple plaster partition walls.

SIGNIFICANCE

AREA OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: L (for office use only)

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Imperial Hotel is significant as Greenville's first skyscraper, illustrating the commercial growth of the city, and as the third example of early high rise architecture in South

Carolina. Built in 1911-1912, this hotel is an excellent example of a Commercial Style building designed by a South Carolina architect.(1)

Designed by Greenville architects F.H. and J.G. Cunningham as a seven-story, ninety room commercial hotel, construction was begun in 1911 by W. M. Jordan of Greenville and completed in 1912.(2) Both J.G. Cunningham, the architect, and W. M. Jordan, the builder, were principals in the Washington Street Hotel Company, organized as the development firm.(3) The Imperial Hotel is the major building attributed to Cunningham as an architect.

The hotel was constructed during a period of economic prosperity brought to Greenville by an expanding cotton textile industry. Advertised as one of the most successful, undergoing major additions in 1917 and again in 1923.(4) By 1930, it was the largest hotel in Greenville with 250 rooms.(5)

The Imperial Hotel is significant as an early South Carolina Example of the Commercial Style of architecture which originated in Chicago in the late 1870s. Mostly devoid of ornamentation, Commercial Style buildings were intended to be utilitarian.(6) Structurally, this style of building featured an internal steel frame with brick facing. As an example of building technology the Commercial Style was a forerunner of the later, more familiar skyscraper of New York and Chicago, such as the Empire State Building.(7) Examples of early multi-story buildings in South Carolina are few, due to the local economic conditions, and lag several years behind those designed and executed in northern states.

The original section of the Imperial Hotel has exterior masonry bearing walls with a steel frame carrying only interior loads. Later additions feature full steel skeleton frames covered in brick veneer. This reliance on the more traditional construction of load bearing masonry further supports the slow adoption of modern construction technology by South Carolina architects. The first steel-frame skyscraper constructed in the state was the National Loan and Exchange Bank Building (Barringer building), 1901-1903, in Columbia; the second was the People's National Bank Building in Charleston, 1908. Both were designed by new York architects. The Imperial Hotel is South Carolina's third skyscraper, Greenville's first skyscraper designed by a South Carolina architect.

ACREAGE: 0.64 acres

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: The boundary for the Imperial Hotel nomination is shown as the red line on the accompanying Greenville County Tax Map #49, which is drawn on a scale of one inch equals forty feet. The nominated property includes only the historic building and its immediate surroundings.

QUAD NAME: Greenville

Quad Scale: 1:62500

UTM REFERENCE POINT: 17/37820/3857250

#### FOOTNOTES

- (1) Frank Barnes, The Greenville Story (Greenville, SC: By the Author, 1956), p. 149.
- (2) Manufacturers Record (November 16, 1911), p.75.
- (3) Manufacturers Record (December 14, 1911), P. 67.
- (4) Sanborn Insurance Map Company, Sanborn Insurance Map of Greenville, South Carolina, 1917, 1918, 1919; Greenville Semi-Weekly News, December 30, 1923.
- (5) James M. Richardson, History of Greenville County, South Carolina (Atlanta, GA: A.H. Clanston Publisher, 1930), p. 118.
- (6) Marcus Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780 (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1969), pp. 186-190.
- (7) Carl W. Condit, American Building (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 186-87.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barnes, Frank. The Greenville Story. Greenville, SC: By the Author, 1956.
- Condit, Carl W. American Building, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- Greenville Semi-weekly News, 30 December 1923.
- Manufacturers Record, 16 November 1911; 14 December 1911.
- Sanborn Insurance Map Company. Sanborn Insurance Maps of Greenville, South Carolina, 1917; 1918; 1919.
- Whiffen, Marcus. American Architecture Since 1780. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1969.